

VZCZCXRO7589
RR RUEHLN RUEHSK RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHDBU #0316/01 0711352
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 121352Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0148
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0046
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0021
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEHAST/USOFFICE ALMATY 0006
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0227

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 000316

SIPDIS

ALMATY FOR USAID

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [EFIN](#) [EAGR](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: FOOD DISTRIBUTION PEACEFUL BUT POVERTY STRIKING IN SOUTHERN
TAJIKISTAN

REF: DUSHANBE 245

DUSHANBE 00000316 001.2 OF 002

¶1. Summary: USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) provided Tajikistan with \$3.35 million for emergency winter food distribution for the most vulnerable in Tajikistan. On March 5, Ambassador Jacobson visited Vaksh village in Khatlon province in Southern Tajikistan to see food being distributed by implementer Save the Children. Although some men were present at the event, it was only a handful compared to the previous week's distribution in Hiloli village (reftel). Further, the severity of poverty in the community was clear, with over 50% of village inhabitants receiving food. The anger over perceived inequity in food distribution witnessed during Assistance Coordinator Dan Rosenblum's visit was not evident this time. End Summary.

¶2. With over \$3 million of funding from USAID's OFDA, the USG, through implementers Mercy Corps and Save the Children, is distributing food to vulnerable families in some of the most food-insecure rural areas of Tajikistan. The funding buys flour, cooking oil and lentils in the region. Implementers worked with local governments to identify the most vulnerable areas and the most vulnerable households in those areas. Criteria for assessing vulnerability of households included those headed by women, headed by pensioners, with children under two, the homeless, and the disabled without a source of regular income or major assets.

¶3. On March 6, Ambassador Jacobson attended a food distribution in Vaksh village in the Khatlon province in southern Tajikistan. Vaksh village is an area without irrigation that depends on rain for agricultural production and drinking water. Of 13,000 people living in the village, 50% are qualified as vulnerable and eligible for food aid.

¶4. As in most rural areas, nearly every family has had one or more members migrate to Russia for work and to send back money. Usually when visiting such villages, we see lots of women and children and few older men. Although the previous week's visit to a nearby village found a large crowd of men (reftel), the Vaksh visit was similar to the usual experience. Around 200 people were waiting in line for their ration of wheat flour,

lentils, and oil. They were predominantly women and older men with perhaps 15 younger men. The scene was active, with many carts running this way and that, heavy with their loads of food. The crowd seemed excited and upbeat. There was no incident similar to the small scuffle seen earlier (reftel).

15. Despite the happy scene at the distribution site, the visit revealed clear signs of the increasing and crushing poverty of rural Tajikistan. The local Jamoat (sub-district government) official estimated that half of the 11,000 migrant workers from her area would not return to work in Russia in the spring, as they have in the past. Remittances from these workers in Russia are an essential source of income for Tajik families, and their decline will cause a sharp increase in the number of people who require aid.

16. After visiting the distribution site, Ambassador Jacobson toured a former technical high school dormitory converted into housing for the poor, all of whom received food from the OFDA program. Fifty families now live in the facility, which has no electricity, no water, and no glass in any windows. Those with slightly more resources covered their windows with plastic sheeting to provide some minimal protection from the elements. One woman opened her door and invited the Ambassador in. The apartment was home to the woman, her day-laborer husband, and seven children. It consisted of two small rooms and a hall - all together they were smaller than an Embassy Dushanbe office. The only heating came from a small wood-burning stove in the smaller of the two rooms. Residents of this dormitory were particularly vulnerable to economic shocks because they lacked gardens and could not grow any of their own food.

DUSHANBE 00000316 002.2 OF 002

16. Comment: The food security issues in Vaksh, just as those in Hiloli, demonstrate the continued negative impact from last year's harsh winter. The community was clearly worried about the decline in remittances, and we will continue to monitor the rates of remittances closely, particularly how many migrants return to Russia this spring. The visit was also a grim reminder of the depth of poverty in Tajikistan, where villages such as this one dot the countryside.
JACOBSON